Linguistics is the scientific study of language, its structure and function as a means of communication, its acquisition, and the mental and physiological processes involved in its use. Knowledge of the structure, origins, and functions of language can provide deep insight into human nature and behavior. The major in linguistics prepares students for professional studies in law, medicine, technology, data science, education, and business, as well as for graduate work in linguistics, cognitive science, and related disciplines.

Three introductory courses examining the sound structure of human language, the structure of words and sentences, and the structure of linguistic meaning make up the core of the major and provide the foundation for more advanced work. More specialized courses in linguistics introduce students to the theories, research methods and current research developments in various subfields.

Linguistics majors are encouraged to participate in faculty research and to develop independent research. Students often enhance their linguistics major through interdisciplinary studies in cognitive science, communication sciences and disorders, psychology, philosophy, international studies, mathematics, or computer science. Students with a strong record in their major courses and an interest in pursuing linguistics at the graduate level are encouraged to enroll in 400-level courses.

Programs of Study

- Linguistics Major (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/linguistics/linguistics-major)
- Linguistics Minor (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/linguistics/linguistics-minor)
- Linguistics BA/MA (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/linguistics/linguistics-ba-ma)

All 200-level linguistics courses have an experimental requirement. Students may fulfill this requirement by participating in any combination of two one-hour experiments or video showings. The experiments will be part of ongoing departmental research and illustrate features of language structure and use relevant to topics covered in the core linguistics curriculum. Similarly, the videos will be on topics covered in the core curriculum.

LING 101-6 First-Year Seminar (1 Unit)  WCAS First-Year Seminar
LING 220-0 Language and Society (1 Unit)  Introduction to linguistic variation and change from a variety of perspectives on social processes. How language can be connected with social group membership and viewed as a tool used in social practice to construct identity. These issues are explored through the quantitative analysis of linguistic variation in a social context. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area
LING 221-0 Language and Prejudice (1 Unit)  Exploration of attitudes toward different accents, dialects, and speech styles in the US context. The relation between language and thought; how language may reflect or reinforce prejudice. Introduction to methods in linguistic research. Ethics Values Distro Area
LING 222-0 Language, Politics, and Identity (1 Unit)  Role of language in constructing, preserving, and manipulating political and national identities. Topics include language discrimination, linguistic nationalism, language and religion, alphabet issues, dialect issues. Regional content varies. Ethics Values Distro Area
LING 223-0 Language and Gender (1 Unit)  Exploration of socially significant differences in the language used by/about/to men and women, focusing on the role of language in constructing gender as part of local communities of practice. Taught with GNDR_ST 234-0; may not receive credit for both courses. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area
LING 250-0 Sound Patterns in Human Language (1 Unit)  Introduction to phonetics and phonology. Description and classification of speech sounds in terms of articulation, acoustics, and perception. Similarities and differences of sound patterns across languages. Introduction to speech technology. Natural Sciences Distro Area
LING 260-0 Formal Analysis of Words & Sentences (1 Unit)  Formal structure of words (morphology) and sentences (syntax) in natural language. Biological basis of human language. Formal Studies Distro Area
LING 270-0 Meaning (1 Unit)  How information is encoded in words and sentences and how speakers and listeners use language to communicate. Formal Studies Distro Area
LING 300-0 Topics in Linguistics (1 Unit)  Topics in linguistic theory. Content varies. May be repeated for credit with different topic.
LING 311-0 Child Language (1 Unit)  Introduction to first-language acquisition. How infants and children learn the grammar (structure of sounds, words, and sentences) of their native language. Innate and environmental factors in linguistic development. Emphasis on experimental and corpus-based methods of inquiry. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area
LING 315-0 Experimental Approaches to Word Form Processing (1 Unit)  Experimental techniques and theoretical models for analyzing perception and production of spoken and written word forms. Access to the mental lexicon in perception and production. Prerequisite: LING 250-0 or consent of instructor. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area
LING 316-0 Experimental Syntax (1 Unit)  Experimental methodologies and theories of sentence comprehension. Studies of syntactic structures in sentence comprehension. Prerequisite: LING 260-0 or consent of instructor. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area
LING 317-0 Experimental Pragmatics (1 Unit)  Experimental methodologies for analyzing the role of context in utterance production and comprehension. Prerequisite: LING 270-0 or consent of instructor. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area
LING 320-0 Sociolinguistics (1 Unit)  Overview of classic and contemporary work in sociolinguistics. How quantitative methods in linguistics can be coupled with social theoretic insights to engage questions in linguistic variation and change, stylistic practice, how language reflects, reinforces, or contests social inequalities. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area
LING 321-0 Bilingualism (1 Unit)  Cognitive, linguistic, neuroscientific, and computational aspects of the acquisition, representation, and processing of two or more languages in an individual's mind/brain. Prerequisite: LING 250-0, LING 260-0, or LING 270-0. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area
LING 327-0 Language and Sexuality (1 Unit)  The use of language to construct sexual identity, focusing on the language of and about gay men and lesbians. Topics include heteronormativity, identity labels and categories, gender versus sexuality, and cross-cultural sexual diversity. Prerequisite: a course in linguistics or consent of instructor.

LING 330-0 Research Methods in Linguistics (1 Unit)  Methods of linguistic data collection, management, and analysis with an emphasis on the use of computational, experimental, and statistical methods.  

Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area

LING 334-0 Introduction to Computational Linguistics (1 Unit)  Hands-on introduction to computational methods in empirical linguistic analysis and natural language processing.  

Formal Studies Distro Area

LING 336-0 Words, Networks and the Internet (1 Unit)  Word networks and language on the Internet. Python tools for exploring spam, search engines, and social media. Prerequisite: LING 330-0, LING 334-0, LING 361-0, or equivalent background.  

Formal Studies Distro Area

LING 341-0 Language Typology (1 Unit)  A comparison of varying and universal features of the world’s languages. Prerequisite: LING 250-0, LING 260-0, or LING 270-0.  

Formal Studies Distro Area

LING 342-0 Structure of Various Languages (1 Unit)  Phonological, morphological, or syntactic structure of a particular language. May be repeated for credit with change in language.  

Formal Studies Distro Area

LING 350-0 Fundamentals of Laboratory Phonology (1 Unit)  Articulatory and acoustic phonetics. Syllable structure, phonotactics, morpho-phonological alternation, stress. Fundamentals of experimental design and data analysis. Prerequisite: LING 250-0 or consent of instructor.  

Natural Sciences Distro Area

LING 360-0 Fundamentals of Syntax (1 Unit)  Fundamental principles of theoretical syntax. Phrase structure, argument structure, movement operations. Emphasis on argumentation, hypothesis formation and testing, and analytic methods. Prerequisite: LING 260-0 or consent of instructor.  

Formal Studies Distro Area

LING 361-0 Morphology (1 Unit)  Issues in theoretical morphology. The internal structure of words. Linguistic and psycholinguistic findings about the representation and processing of word structures. Prerequisite: LING 250-0, LING 260-0, or LING 270-0.  

Formal Studies Distro Area

LING 363-0 Making a Dictionary: The Northwestern Project (1 Unit)  Creation of an online dictionary of Northwestern jargon, slang, etc. Learning about the connection between language, society, and identity; sociolinguistic fieldwork; lexicography; politics of dictionaries; culture and power of book form vs. digital. LING 363-0 and SLAVIC 322-0 are taught together; may not receive credit for both courses. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area

LING 370-0 Fundamentals of Meaning (1 Unit)  Theoretical approaches to the study of linguistic meaning. Topics include word meaning, argument and event structure, sentence meaning, truth conditions, and inference types (e.g., entailment, implicature, presupposition).